



Mozambique

International Religious Freedom Report 2008

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice. Prominent social leaders took positive steps to promote religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 308,642 square miles and a population of 19.9 million. According to the 1997 census, 24 percent are Roman Catholic, 22 percent Protestant, 20 percent Muslim, and one-third do not profess a religion or belief; however, religious leaders speculated that a significant number of this group practiced some form of traditional indigenous religions, a category not included in the 1997 census. The South Asian immigrant population is predominantly Muslim.

Major Christian groups include Anglican, Baptist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Congregational, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, and Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, as well as evangelical, apostolic, and Pentecostal churches. The three principal Islamic organizations are the Mohammedan Community, Islamic Congress, and Islamic Council. There are small Jewish, Hindu, and Baha'i groups.

Religious communities are dispersed throughout the country. The northern provinces are predominantly Muslim, particularly along the coast, while areas of the northern interior have a stronger concentration of Christian communities. Christians are generally more numerous in the southern and central regions, but Muslims are also present in these areas.

Muslim journalists report that the distinction between Sunni and Shi'a is not particularly important for many local Muslims, and Muslims are much more likely to identify themselves by the local religious leader they follow than as Sunni or Shi'a.

Many small, independent Protestant and Catholic churches that have split from mainstream denominations fuse African traditional beliefs and practices within a Christian framework. The country's leading mosques and the Catholic Church have gradually eliminated many traditional indigenous practices from their places of worship; however, some Christian and Muslim adherents continue to incorporate traditional practices and rituals.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and other laws and policies contributed to the generally free practice of religion. The law at all levels protects this right in full against abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government does not officially favor a particular religion; however, Muslim leaders and journalists objected to what they say is silent discrimination against the Muslim community. They cited the example of National Family Day, a holiday that is observed on December 25. Officially, there are no national holidays that are religious in nature, but some members of the Muslim community believe that Eid al-Fitr should be made a national holiday if Christmas is observed de facto under the guise of family unification.

The Constitution prohibits political parties from being directly affiliated with a religion or church.

The Government officially acknowledges the Eid festival by permitting Muslims to take leave on this day, with a presidential speech and other events. The Government recognizes Eid on a date identified by the South Asian community, in a perceived slight to black Muslims, who celebrate the festival on a different day.

The Law on Religious Freedom requires religious institutions and missionary organizations to register with the Ministry of Justice, reveal their principal source of funding, and provide the names of at least 500 followers in good standing. No particular benefits or privileges are associated with registration, and there were no reports that the Government refused to register any religious group during the period covered by this report. The Christian Council reported that not all religious groups register, but unregistered groups worship unhindered by the Government. There are 735 religious denominations and 151 religious organizations registered with the Department of Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Justice. During the reporting period, three denominations and seven religious organizations were registered.

The Government routinely grants visas and residence permits to foreign missionaries. Like all foreign residents, missionaries face a somewhat burdensome process in obtaining legal residency; however, they generally conduct their activities without government interference.

The Constitution gives religious groups the right to acquire and own assets, and a more recent law permits them to own and operate schools, which are increasing in number. Religious instruction is the primary focus of the new primary and secondary schools, but universities associated with religious denominations do not offer religious studies. Many students at Catholic University branches are Muslim, particularly in Pemba. Religious instruction in public schools is strictly prohibited.

Religious activities and positions were reported in the press without restriction; however, some Muslim journalists reported that the press gave more coverage to Christian holidays than Islamic days of cultural and religious importance.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

The Government generally respected religious freedom in practice. There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom by the Government during the period covered by this report.

Most places of worship nationalized by the Government in 1977 have been returned to their respective religious organizations; however, the Catholic Church and a few Muslim communities maintained that other properties, including schools, health centers, and private residences, remaining in state hands belong to them and continued to press for their return. The issue of restitution is complex, as many of these buildings continued to be used for government-administered schools and clinics. While the final responsibility for establishing a process for property restitution lies with the provincial governments, the Directorate for Religious Affairs is mandated to address the general issue.

While all major religious groups are represented in the National Assembly and government ministries, many Muslims felt underrepresented because the majority of leadership positions in the Government and media

services were held by Christians.

As a result of the absence of a prominent Muslim leader on the Council of State, a constitutionally mandated advisory body created in 2005 and subsequent claims by Muslim leaders of favoritism toward Christians, many Muslim leaders lobbied the Government to appoint a Muslim as Ombudsman. As of the end of the reporting period, the Government had not filled the position.

The Papal Nunciature reported that the Government continued to occupy properties in Inhambane, Maputo, Niassa, and Zambezia Provinces that were used for schools, seminaries, and residences, and that the Vatican had entered into negotiations with the Government for their restitution. Because of the complexity of the issue and apparent contradictions within the law, the Catholic Church preferred to collaborate with the Government to reach resolution, rather than rely on the court system.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees in the country.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There were no reports of societal abuses or discrimination based on religious affiliation, belief, or practice.

Many Muslims felt underrepresented because the majority of positions in government, information, and media services were held by Christians.

Among Muslims, the black and South Asian communities tend to remain separate, with each group generally attending different mosques and schools. While relations between blacks and established citizens of South Asian origin are generally good, cultural conflict between black communities and South Asian immigrants has led to tensions. There was controversy over the official date of the Eid al-Fitr festival. Black Muslims chose the date based on when the full moon is sighted from anywhere within the geographical boundaries of the country, whereas Asian Muslims chose the date based on when it is sighted within a much wider area outside the country, making the date of the Eid festival contentious. Despite these differences, there were signs that tension were lessening as younger Muslims seemed to recognize the need for dialogue to reconcile their differences.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Released on September 19, 2008

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